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Journey to the Center of the Earth

Jules Verne · *1864* · *Frederick Amadeus Malleson translation*

In Hamburg, Professor Lidenbrock finds a runic parchment that promises a way to the centre of the earth through a crater in Iceland. He takes his nephew Axel and the guide Hans down into the dark. The journey is a test of courage, obedience, and a scientist's conviction.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Should Axel follow his uncle into a crater on the strength of a dead alchemist's words, and what does courage look like when the way back is lost?

"Descend, bold traveller, into the crater of the jokul of Sneffels, which the shadow of Scartaris touches before the kalends of July, and you will attain the centre of the earth; which I have done, Arne Saknussemm."

The decoded message of Arne Saknussemm, as Lidenbrock reads it

Axel is afraid and reasonable; Lidenbrock is sure. Hans, hired in Iceland, is patient and life-saving. They descend the Sneffels crater, wander in galleries, nearly die of thirst, and come to an underground sea. A storm, prehistoric creatures, and a wrong turning do not end them: a volcanic shaft throws them out on Stromboli. They have not quietly strolled to the centre, but they have gone farther than fear would have gone alone.

KEY CHARACTERS

Professor Otto Lidenbrock
Axel's uncle, a mineralogist of fierce certainty, who treats Saknussemm's words as a command.

Axel
The narrator, younger, in love, and often afraid; he goes down anyway.

Hans Bjelke
The Icelandic guide, few in words, quick with a pickaxe, and the party's practical savior.

Grauben
Axel's betrothed in Hamburg, who lets him go and waits.

Arne Saknussemm
The sixteenth-century traveler whose cipher starts the journey; present only in writing.

DESCEND, BOLD TRAVELLER

> *"Descend, bold traveller, into the crater of the jokul of Sneffels, which the shadow of Scartaris touches before the kalends of July, and you will attain the centre of the earth; which I have done, Arne Saknussemm."*
>
> The decoded parchment

> *"We are saved!"*
>
> **Axel** · When Hans finds water

Grades 6–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Runic Paper

CHAPTERS I–VII

Lidenbrock finds a slip of coded runes in an old Icelandic book and will not rest until it is read. Axel, almost by accident, discovers the cipher.

- The professor's house in Hamburg is a place of science and of a short temper.
- Axel loves Grauben and would rather stay than descend.
- Once the message is clear, Lidenbrock treats it as an order.

> *"Descend, bold traveller, into the crater of the jokul of Sneffels, which the shadow of Scartaris touches before the kalends of July, and you will attain the centre of the earth; which I have done, Arne Saknussemm."*
>
> Saknussemm's message, early chapters

02

Iceland, and Sneffels

CHAPTERS VIII–XVII

They travel to Reykjavik, hire Hans, and climb the Sneffels jokul. The shadow of Scartaris marks the right chimney, and they go down.

- Iceland is not a backdrop only; it is a hard country of guides, horses, and volcanic rock.
- Hans's calm is already a kind of courage.
- Axel's fears are not foolish; they are incomplete.

03

Galleries, Thirst, and a Guide's Wit

CHAPTERS XVIII–XXIV

Underground paths fork and fail. Water gives out; Hans strikes a rock and saves them. Axel is briefly lost and is found again by a voice along the gallery.

- The professor's compass and conviction nearly kill them when the path is wrong.
- "We are saved!" Axel cries when Hans attacks the rock for water.
- Obedience and invention have to live together in the dark.

> *"We are saved!"*
>
> **Axel** · When Hans uses the pickaxe to reach water

04

The Underground Sea

CHAPTERS XXV–XXXV

They come to a vast cavern and a sea, build a raft, and sail under a ceiling of rock. A storm, strange light, and great beasts of another age test them.

- Lidenbrock names and lectures even here; Axel sees and fears.
- The sea-fight of ancient creatures is wonder and danger together.
- A mast, a storm, and a landing leave them still far from a known exit.

05

Up the Chimney

LATER CHAPTERS, TO THE END

A further descent, a blocked way, and an explosion they cannot control send the raft up a volcanic shaft. They are thrown out on Stromboli, in Italy, alive.

- Saknussemm's path is not a tidy road to the exact centre.
- The exit is a mercy as much as a calculation.
- Return to Hamburg is triumph mixed with the knowledge of how little they ruled the earth they entered.

Courage and Fear | Science and Conviction | Obedience | Wonder | Providence in Extremity

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–12

1. The hosted text is Frederick Amadeus Malleson's translation (Project Gutenberg #3748). It uses "centre," "jokul," and "Sneffels," and names the professor Lidenbrock (not a later spelling).
2. Saknussemm's message in this text is: "Descend, bold traveller, into the crater of the jokul of Sneffels, which the shadow of Scartaris touches before the kalends of July, and you will attain the centre of the earth; which I have done, Arne Saknussemm."
3. Axel's cry at the rock is "We are saved!"
4. The book is scientific romance, not a geology textbook. The underground sea and its beasts are part of Verne's invention.
5. They exit by Stromboli, not by neatly arriving at a mapped centre and walking back.

Quotations are verbatim from the Frederick Amadeus Malleson translation, Project Gutenberg #3748, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/journey-to-the-center-of-the-earth/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.